



Charlotte Mason's House of Education,
Scale How, Ambleside, UK, 2009

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WHENCE AND WHITHER.

PART II.

BY THE EDITOR.

THE morphologist, the biologist, leave us without a shadow of hesitation in following the great *bouleversement* of thought, summed up in the term *evolution*. We are no longer able to believe otherwise than that man is the issue of processes, ages long in their development; and what is more, and even more curious, each individual child, from the moment of his conception to that of his birth, appears in his own person to mark an incredible number of the stages of this evolutionary process. The realization of this truth has made a great impression on the minds of men. We feel ourselves to be part of a process, and to be called upon, at the same time, to assist in the process, not for ourselves exactly, but for any part of the world upon which our influence bears; especially for the children who are so peculiarly given over to us. But there comes, as we have seen, a point where we must arise and make our protest. The physical evolution of man admits of no doubt, the psychical evolution, on the other hand, is not only not proven, but the whole weight of existing evidence appears to go into the opposite scale.

The age of materialism has run its course: we recognize matter as force, but as altogether subject force, and it is the spirit in a man which shapes and uses his material substance, in its own ways to its own ends. Who can tell the way of the spirit? Perhaps this is one of the ultimate facts upon which man has not yet been able to speculate to any purpose; but when we consider the almost unlimited powers of loving and of trusting, of discriminating and of apprehending, of perceiving and of knowing, which a child possesses, and compare these with the blunted sensibilities and slower apprehension of the grown man or woman of the same calibre, we are certainly not inclined to think that growth from less to more, and from small to great, is the condition of the spiritual life: that is, of that part of us which loves and worships, reasons and thinks, learns and applies knowledge. Rather would it

seem to be true of every child in his degree, as of the divine and typical Child, that He giveth not the Spirit by measure to him. It is curious how the philosophy of the Bible is always well in advance of our latest thought. He grew in wisdom and in stature, we are told. Now what is wisdom, philosophy? Is it not the recognition of *relations*? First, we have to understand relations of time and space and matter, the natural philosophy which made up so much of the wisdom of Solomon; then, by slow degrees, and more and more, we learn that moral philosophy which determines our relations of love and justice and duty to each other: later, perhaps, we investigate the profound and puzzling subject of the inter-relations of our own most composite being,—mental philosophy. And in all these and beyond all these we apprehend slowly and feebly the highest relation of all, the relation to God, which we call religion. In this science of the relations of things consists what we call wisdom, and wisdom is not born in any man,—apparently not even in the Son of man Himself. He grew in wisdom, in the sweet gradual apprehension of all the relations of life: but the power of apprehending, the strong, subtle, discerning spirit, whose function it is to grasp and understand, appropriate and use, all the relations which bind all things to all other things, this was not given to Him by measure, nor, we may reverently believe, is it so given to us.

That there are differences in the measures of men, in their intellectual and moral stature, is evident enough; but it is well that we should realize the nature of these differences, that they are differences of kind and not of degree, and depend upon what we glibly call the laws of heredity, which bring it to pass that man in his various aspects shall make up that conceivably perfect whole possible to mankind. This is a quite different thing from the notion of a small and feeble measure of heart and intellect in the child, to grow by degrees into the robust and noble spiritual development which, according to the psychical evolutionist, should distinguish the adult human being.

These are quite practical and simple considerations for everyone entrusted with the bringing up of a child, and are not to be set aside as abstract principles, the discussion of which should serve little purpose beyond that of sharpening

the wits of the schoolmen. As a matter of fact, we do not *realize* children, we under-estimate them; in the divine words, we 'despise' them, with the best intentions in the world, because we confound the immaturity of their frames, and their absolute ignorance as to the relations of things, with spiritual impotence: whereas the fact probably is, that never is intellectual power so keen, the moral sense so strong, spiritual perception so piercing, as in those days of childhood which we regard with a supercilious, if kindly, smile. A child is a person in whom all possibilities are present—present now at this very moment—not to be educed after years and efforts manifold on the part of the educator; but indeed it is a greater thing to direct and use this wealth of spiritual power than to develop the so-called faculties of the child. It cannot be too strongly urged that our education of children will depend, *nolens volens*, upon the conception we form of them. If we regard them as instruments fit and capable for the carrying out of the Divine purpose in the progress of the world, we shall endeavour to discern the signs of the times, perceive in what directions we are being led, and prepare the children to carry forward the work of the world, by giving them vitalizing ideas concerning each department of that work.

Having settled it with ourselves that we and the children alike live for the advancement of the race, that our work is immediately with them, and through them mediately for all, and that they are perfectly fitted to receive those ideas which are for the inspiration of life, we must next settle it with ourselves in what directions we shall set up spiritual activities in the children.

We have established our *whence* in the potency of the child. We look for our *whither* in the living thought of the day, which probably indicates the directions in which the race is making progress. We find that all men everywhere are keenly interested in science, that the world waits and watches for great discoveries; we too, wait and watch, believing that, as Coleridge said long ago, great ideas of Nature are imparted to minds already prepared to receive them by a higher Power than Nature herself.

At the last meeting of the British Association, the President lamented that the progress of science was greatly hindered by the fact that we no longer had field naturalists, close

observers of Nature as she is. The *Spectator* made a lamentable remark thereupon. It is all written in books, said this journal, so we have no longer any need to go to Nature herself. Now the knowledge of Nature which we get out of books is not real knowledge; the use of books is, to help the young student to verify facts he has already seen for himself. We, of the P.N.E.U., are before all things, Nature-lovers; we conceive that intimate acquaintance with every natural object within his reach, is the first, and possibly, the best part of the child's education. For himself, all his life long, he will be soothed by—

"The breathing balm,
The silence and the calm,
Of mute insensate things."

And for science, he is in a position to do just the work which is most needed; he will be a close loving observer of Nature at first hand, storing facts, and free from all impatient greed for inferences.

Looking out on the realm of art again, we think we discern the signs of the times. Some of us begin to learn the lesson that a prophet has been raised up to deliver to this generation. We begin to understand that mere technique, however perfect—whether in the rendering of flesh tints, or marbles, or of a musical composition of extreme difficulty—is not necessarily high Art. It is beginning to dawn upon us that Art is great only in proportion to the greatness of the idea that it expresses; while, what we ask of the execution, the technique, is that it shall be adequate to the inspiring idea. But surely these high themes have nothing to do with the bringing up of children? Yes, they have; everything. In the first place, we shall permit no pseudo Art to live in the same house with our children; next, we shall bring our own facile tastes and opinions to some such searching test as we have indicated; knowing that the children imbibe the thoughts that are in us, whether we will or no; and, lastly, we shall inspire our children with those great ideas which shall create a demand, anyway, for great Art.

In literature, we have definite ends in view, both for our own children, and for the world through them. We wish the children to grow up to find joy and refreshment in the taste, the flavour of a *book*. We do not mean by a book any

printed matter in a binding, but a work possessing certain literary qualities which shall bring that sensible delight to the reader which belongs to a literary word fitly spoken. It is a sad fact that we are losing our joy in literary form. We are in such haste to be instructed by facts or titilated by theories, that we have no leisure to linger over the mere putting of a thought. But this is our error, for words are mighty both to delight and to inspire. If we were not as blind as bats, we should long ago have discovered a truth very fully indicated in the Bible—that that which is once said with perfect fitness can never be said again, and becomes ever thereafter a living power in the world. But in literature, as in art, we require more than mere form. Great ideas are brooding over the chaos of our thought; and it is he who shall say the things we are all dumbly thinking, who shall be to us as a teacher sent from God.

For the children? They must grow up upon the best. There must never be a period in their lives when they are allowed to read or listen to twaddle or reading-made-easy. There is never a time when they are unequal to worthy thoughts, well put, inspiring tales, well told. Let Blake's "Songs of Innocence" represent their standard in poetry; De Foe and Stevenson, in prose; and we shall train a race of readers who will demand *literature*, that is, the fit and beautiful expression of inspiring ideas and pictures of life. Perhaps a printed form to the effect that gifts of books to the children will not be welcome in such and such a family, would greatly assist in this endeavour!

To instance one more point—there is a reaching out in all directions after the conception expressed in the words "the solidarity of the race." We have probably never before felt as now in absolute relation with all men everywhere; everything human is precious to us, the past belongs to us as the present, and we linger tenderly over evidences of the personality of men and women who lived ages ago. An American poet expresses this feeling with western intensity, but he does not exaggerate when he tells us that *he* is the soldier wounded in battle, *he* is the galley slave, and *he* is the hero come to the rescue, that every human pulse is *his* pulse, every fall *his* fall, and every moral victory *his* triumph. The writer recollects the moment when the conviction of the

common sisterhood of women was brought home to her in a way never to be forgotten. She was driving from station to station in London, and saw a drunken woman carried on a door. She knew by the shock of pain and the tears the sight brought that the woman was not outside of her, but was in some mysterious way part of her—her very self. This was a new perception to the girl, and one never again to be lost sight of. Such shocks of recognition probably come to most of us, and when they come to the Greathearts of the world we get our Elizabeth Frys, our Wilberforces, our Florence Nightingales. Deeds of pity have been done through all the Christian ages, and, indeed, wherever the human heart has had free play, but to feel pity for another and to be aware, however dimly, that that other is, part and lot, indissolubly bound up with ourselves, these are two things. We venture to believe that this is the stage which the education of mankind, as divinely conducted, has reached in our day. In other days men did good for the love of God, or to save their own souls; they acted uprightly because it behoved themselves to be just in all their dealings, but the motives which stir us in our relation to each other now are more intimate, tender, indefinable, soul-compelling. What the issues will be when we have learned to con understandingly this new page in the Book of Life we cannot foretell, but we may hope that the Kingdom of God is coming upon us.

Studying reverently *these* signs of the times, what indications do we find for our guidance in the bringing up of children? The tender sympathy of the child must be allowed to flow in ways of help and kindness towards all life that anyway touches his. I once knew a little girl of five, who came in from her walk under an obvious cloud of distress. "What is the matter, H——?" she was asked. A quick little "Nothing," with the reticence of her family, was all that could be got out of her for some minutes, but a caress broke her down, and, in a passion of pity, she sobbed out "A poor man, no home, no food, no bed to lie upon!" Young as she was, the revelation of the common life in humanity had come upon her; she was one with the beggar and suffered with him. Children must, of course, be shielded from such intense suffering, but woe to mother

or nurse who would shield by systematically hardening the child's heart. This little girl should have had the relief of helping, and then the pain of sympathy would not have been too much for her. Whatever our own opinion of the world and of human nature, let us be careful how we breathe the word "imposter" into the ear of a child, until he is old enough to understand that if the man is an imposter, that does but make him the object of a deeper pity and a wiser help—a help whose object is not to relieve, but to reform.

Again, children are open to vanity as to all other evil dispositions possible to human nature. They must be educated to give and to help without any notion that to do so is goodness on their part. It is very easy to keep them in the attitude of mind natural to a child, that to serve is promotion to the person who serves, for indeed he has no absolute claim to be in a position to pour benefits upon another. The child's range of sympathy must be widened, his love must go out to far and near, rich and poor; distress abroad and distress at home should appeal to him equally; and always he should give some manner of help *at real cost to himself*. When he is old enough, the object lessons of the newspapers should be brought before him. He should know that atrocities in Armenia, for instance, are the cause of real heart-trouble in English homes; that there are cases of abstract right and wrong for nations as for individuals, which admit of no considerations of expediency; that to succour our neighbour in mortal distress is such an occasion, and that he who has fallen among thieves is therefore our neighbour, whether as a nation or as an individual. Do not let us bring up our children in glass houses, for fear of the ravages of pity upon their tender hearts. Let them know of any distress which would naturally come before them, and let them ease their own pain by alleviating, in some way, the sufferings they sorrow for. Children were not given to us with infinite possibilities of love and pity that we might choke the springs of pity and train them into hardness of heart. It is our part, on the contrary, to prepare these little ministers of grace for the larger and fuller revelation of the kingdom of heaven, that is coming upon us.

(To be continued.)

AUNT MA'S BUDGET.

BY MRS. FRANCIS F. STEINTHAL.

MY DEAR CHILDREN,—Now I feel even nearer to you than ever. For the first time you can take me and keep me in your own nurseries. We must all of us thank Miss Mason for allowing us to come so near to one another. I will take this first opportunity of doing so in your name. As I am writing this letter at Christmas time, it seems more seasonable to say "Three cheers for Miss Mason," to be followed with "Three cheers for our very own Budget."

Now, my children, I want you all to help me, as you have done in the past, to make our Budget and our work a great success. We do not give large prizes; but I am delighted to find that in spite of this you work well, and what is of great importance, you all stick to your work. Forty children began last January to dress dolls, and only one, through removal to school, has not finished the clothes.

My one disappointment has been the Cot Fund. I always imagine, when a scheme does not succeed, that I am in fault, so this year I am quite willing to abide by the decision of my children,—as to whether the cot must be at Pendlebury or at the Great Ormond Hospital, London, or whether we keep and dress a waif, at the Home for Waifs and Strays, Headingley, Leeds. I should be ashamed of being an aunt to so many nieces if we did not manage to combine and help one poor child. Human suffering is, unfortunately, always greater than human charity. Let us try to make one child, at least, happier through our Budget.

Read the Cot Fund account, and see what I would like you to do.

Your loving

AUNTIE MAI.